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Journal - 11/15/65

Arts Council Undecided On Theaters

By **DAVID F. DONNELLY JR.**

Journal-Bulletin Staff Reporter

Tarrytown, N.Y. — Members of the National Council on the Arts concluded their third day of "top-secret" talks here last night on the spending of the council's 4.5-million-dollar budget.

Reportedly high on the agenda of yesterday's meeting was the decision on the location of three federally financed repertory theaters. Providence has been mentioned as a possible location for one of the theaters expected to cost \$500,000 a year each.

Dr. Albert Bush-Brown, president of the Rhode Island School of Design and one of the 24 council members, said he could not discuss the theater projects. "There has been no decision yet on a decision," he added.

The RISD president, who arrived yesterday morning, added he was bound to secrecy by the council's strict "no press wanted" ruling. Reporters who arrived yesterday for a scheduled press briefing were asked to leave the grounds of the Tarrytown House retreat where talks are being conducted.

A member of Sen. Claiborne Pell's staff, Livingston L. Biddle Jr., said the council has been meeting to work out the details of spending its appropriation for the next fiscal year. Mr. Biddle, who said he was "sitting in" on the council session, aided Senator Pell in drafting the aid-to-the arts leg-

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islation which Congress passed in early September.

Mr. Biddle said the three-day session here was one of the first opportunities for the council to discuss its program. Debate was reportedly heated at yesterday's session.

All council recommendations must be approved by Roger L. Stevens, chairman, and special assistant to President Johnson, before federal funds can be expended.

Providence is one of six cities under consideration for the repertory theaters, which will provide three free dramatic classics for school children. The now vacant Albee Theater has been considered as a possible site for the repertory group, if council approval is given to the project as a whole.

Other cities being considered are Cincinnati, Atlanta, Fort Worth, Los Angeles and Kansas City. However, Providence, Kansas City and Cincinnati are considered to have the best chance for selection, according to reliable sources.

Announcement that the repertory theater might be located in Providence was made in late September by School Supt. Charles A. O'Connor Jr. of Providence. Washington officials visited the city at that time to determine its suitability.

Mr. O'Connor's announcement was called "premature" by Rep. John E. Fogarty, who was instrumental in the passage of the bill establishing the arts council. Mr. Fogarty said Mr. O'Connor's announcement could have "jeopardized" the project. However, the school superintendent said he had been told by federal officials who visited the city for preliminary talks that disclosure of the project was "appropriate."

The council has 2.5 million dollars to spend on repertory projects and aid to other theatrical and performing arts groups. An additional two million dollars in its budget must be met by private grants.

Mr. Biddle said the matching funds provision was written into the act to encourage interests in the arts by foundations and interested individuals.

As originally envisioned, the three repertory companies would have professional directors and actors. Performances of Shakespeare's plays and other classics would be presented free for secondary school children on weekdays and at a nominal cost for adults on weekends.

The reasoning behind the repertory theater proposal is that students who see well-produced, live theatrical performances will have a greater interest in their classroom work. The council also reportedly plans to provide repertory training for actors and directors.

Use of the Albee, if Providence is selected for a repertory theater, has not been guaranteed. Renzo Raiss, who is expected to be named artistic director if B. A. Dario acquires the 47-year-old theater for a performing arts center, said he would not make a decision until full plans are available from the council.

The federal repertory company is expected to occupy a theater for 30 to 40 weeks of the year. The Rhode Island School of Design Auditorium and Veterans Memorial Auditorium also have been considered as alternative theater sites.

Mr. Raiss said he would not want to exclude local groups and national touring companies entirely to house the federal company for nine months.

Mr. Dario, president of Lincoln Downs Race Track, said over the weekend that he still is negotiating with the William H. Low Estate Co., owners of the theater property, and the RKO Rhode Island Corp., theater tenants under a long-term ground lease, for purchase of the property. Mr. Dario announced last month that he was attempting to acquire the theater as a performing arts center which would be operated by a non-profit foundation.

The Tarrytown arts council meeting was a poorly kept secret. A Washington reporter discovered the session was planned last week. Frank Crowther, a council aide, asked reporters to leave the estate where talks were being held, although he allowed a magazine representative to photograph the session after pledging him to secrecy.